

**SUMMARY OF THE
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
FEBRUARY 13, 2001**

The Proficiency Testing (PT) Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met by teleconference, on Tuesday, February 13, 2001. The meeting was led by its chair, Ms. Barbara Burmeister of the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene. *The main purpose of this meeting was to discuss PT subcommittee issues, method codes update, PT field of testing, analyte rotation, and schedule for the upcoming face-to-face committee meeting.*

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Burmeister reviewed the minutes from the teleconference on January 30, 2001. The committee agreed that the minutes are final. The status of the Action Items is as follows:

- Ms. Marykay Steinman revised the proposed language on reporting format.
- Mr. Anand Mudambi arranged a teleconference meeting for the Quick Response/Corrective Action working group. The group revised their proposed changes to the NELAC Standard and Mr. Mudambi sent these to the committee.
- Mr. Larry Jackson prepared an agenda for the PT subcommittee meeting on February 26, 2001, and sent it to the committee and interested stakeholders.
- Ms. Burmeister prepared a draft agenda for the committee's face-to-face meeting on February 27, 2001, and sent it to the committee.
- Ms. Burmeister revised the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on Data Reporting and sent them to the committee.
- Ms. Burmeister responded to Mr. Steve Arms from Florida.

PT SUBCOMMITTEE ISSUES STATUS

Reporting Format

Ms. Steinman said that no comments were received on the proposed language for reporting formats. No additional changes have been made to the proposal.

Quick Response/Corrective Action Studies

Mr. Mudambi provided an update for the Quick Response/Corrective Action Studies working group. Mr. Mudambi said that one of the group's goals was to minimize changes to the current NELAC Standard, however the proposed changes require modifications to both Chapters 2 and 4, specifically Sections 2.7.2, 2.7.3, 2.3.3, and 4.1.4. A copy of the group's "straw man" proposal was sent to the committee for review.

The basic components of the proposal include:

- definition of initial and continuing NELAC PT studies and supplemental PT studies;
- differentiation of initial and continuing NELAC PT studies from supplemental PT studies;
- when each type of PT study can be used, and
- how the results of each type of study affect accreditation status.

After Mr. Mudambi reviewed the proposed changes to the standard, he said that he would like more input from the accrediting authorities on the reporting of corrective action PT samples. The committee also questioned whether NELAC should require a PT study following a corrective action. To facilitate discussions during the subcommittee's upcoming face-to-face meeting, Mr. Mudambi said that he will assemble a list of reasons why NELAC should allow corrective action samples and summarize the philosophy behind corrective action PTs. He will also try to get some input from the accrediting authorities.

Data Reporting

Ms. Burmeister revised the FAQs on data reporting and scoring, and sent them to the committee for review. She said that she needs more input from the committee to finalize the FAQs. The committee discussed the use of "No Evaluation" versus "Not Reported" for scoring of non-detected analytes. Mr. Matt Caruso pointed out that "No Evaluation" was reserved for alpha characters in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Criteria Document. Another member confirmed this statement and said that "No Evaluation" is not used for blank results in the Criteria Document. In order to reconcile the language, Ms. Burmeister will modify the FAQ to state, "Results left blank are scored as NOT REPORTED."

Another FAQ, discussed by the committee, was for clarifying how the PT provider reports blank results to the accrediting authority. The committee agreed that the PT provider should either leave the result status blank or include the statement "Not Reported." They also discussed modifying the last sentence of the FAQ to read "There is no penalty for not analyzing an analyte unless the laboratory applied for accreditation and then decided not to report a result for the PT sample for that analyte to fulfill the semi-annual schedule requirement." Ms. Burmeister will edit the FAQ as agreed on by the committee.

A committee member questioned whether the committee should also write a FAQ to provide guidance to the accrediting authorities for evaluating "Not Reported" or "No Evaluation" results. The committee decided that they should try to clarify this as much as possible as a service to the accrediting authorities. Ms. RaeAnn Haynes agreed to draft a FAQ.

30 DAY REQUIREMENT FOR NELAC PT STUDIES

A Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) on the “30 day requirement” was drafted by Mr. Chuck Wibby and sent to the committee. This FAQ discusses the NELAC requirement for the time separation of successive NELAC PT studies. Mr. Wibby explained the intent of the requirement and said that the accrediting authorities have been interpreting the requirement in different ways. At issue is the conflict between the need of an accrediting authority to be able to determine that the PT samples were analyzed at least 30 days apart with the laboratory’s need to finish two PT studies as quickly as possible.

Mr. Wibby suggested that NELAC permit two means by which a laboratory can document compliance with the 30 day requirement:

1. the laboratory can participate in PT studies where the opening date of the second study is at least 30 calendar days after the closing date of the previous study, or
2. the laboratory’s PT provider can collect the dates of analysis and report the analysis dates to the primary accrediting authority.

Regarding the second option, a committee member stated that the PT provider cannot determine the dates of analysis. Another member said that the responsibility of proof is on the laboratory, not the provider. Ms. Burmeister stated that the 1999 NELAC Standard did not clarify this, however she thought that if a laboratory can prove that the analysis dates are 30 days apart, then the analysis should be accepted for NELAC purposes.

FACE-TO-FACE COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

The committee discussed and finalized the meeting agendas for their upcoming committee and subcommittee meetings in Fort Meade, MD. The subcommittee will meet from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on February 26, 2001. The PT Committee will meet separately on the next day to finalize changes, discuss issues and plan for the Seventh NELAC Annual Meeting (NELAC 7).

METHOD CODES UPDATE

Mr. Ralph Obenauf reviewed his revised proposal for the NELAC method codes. He said that he revised the method codes based on the committee’s discussion on January 16, 2001. The method codes are now 5 digits in length. The first digit is a source code and the last digit a check sum. The committee approved his proposal and Mr. Obenauf said that he will start assembling tables to bring to the committee’s face-to-face meeting. Mr. Caruso suggested that he check the January 16, 2001, Federal Register for the new approved methods from the Office of Water (OW).

The committee discussed the possibility of creating method codes for preparation methods. The committee would like to collect this information to find out what methods are being used. A committee member suggested adding an additional field to the database to track the preparation method. Another member questioned how acceptance ranges would be set for different preparation methods. Comment was made that this will have far-reaching impacts, especially with litigation, and that laboratories using very precise methods should not be grouped with those using less rigorous methods (because of cost-savings). A member suggested providing preparation methods, but allowing the provider to determine

whether or not to use them. After some consideration, Ms. Burmeister decided not to act on this issue at the present time, but to bring it up for discussion at NELAC 7.

PT FIELD OF TESTING DISCUSSION

Ms. Burmeister informed the committee of some proposed nomenclature changes. She said that the Program Policy and Structure Committee is trying to eliminate the confusion between the “fields of testing” (also referred to as “scope of accreditation”) and “PT fields of testing.” They are proposing “fields of accreditation” and “fields of proficiency testing” as a solution. No final decisions have been made on this yet.

She then reviewed a draft proposal from the Program Policy and Structure Committee for Chapter 1, Section 1.8.1. This proposal suggests using “technology-matrix-method-analyte/analyte group” for the fields of accreditation. The PT Committee needs to decide whether to adopt this same approach for the PT fields of testing. She said that by including both “technology” and “method” an additional level of complexity would be added to the PT field of testing. A committee member pointed out that if they adopt this approach, they will need to develop a list of equivalent methods. It was also suggested that they could test by concentration range. Ms. Burmeister said that the committee needs to figure out what will work best for both the accrediting authorities and the laboratories. She asked each committee member to come up with a scenario for a solution. The committee will continue discussions at their face-to-face meeting.

ANALYTE ROTATION LANGUAGE DISCUSSION (SECTION 2.3.2.1 vs. B.1.2.5)

Due to lack of time, this discussion will be delayed until the face-to-face meeting.

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS RECEIVED

Comments were received from Ms. Jane Jensen, California Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (CA ELAP). Due to lack of time, discussion will be delayed until the face-to-face meeting.

MEMBERSHIP AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE

There were no updates from the Membership and Outreach Committee.

MISCELLANEOUS

The next meeting for the PT Committee will be held on February 27, 2001, at Fort Meade, MD.

ACTION ITEMS
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
FEBRUARY 13, 2001

Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Mr. Anand Mudambi will put together a list of reasons for doing corrective action samples (along with some discussion for the philosophy behind corrective action samples).	
2.	Ms. RaeAnn Haynes will draft a FAQ to explain how an accrediting authority evaluates a result of “No Eval” or “Not Reported.”	
3.	Ms. Barb Burmeister will edit the FAQ which clarifies how the PT provider reports blank results to the accrediting authority.	
4.	Mr. Ralph Obenauf will begin assembling tables for method codes using the approved method code format.	
5.	Members of the committee were each asked to develop scenarios for the PT field of testing (possible solutions to the problem of including “technology” and/or “method”).	

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PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
FEBRUARY 13, 2001

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